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ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR POLITICAL-MILITARY AFFAIRS MULL
FROM THE AMBASSADOR
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DOD FOR OSD (WHELAN)
EUCOM PLEASE PASS AFRICOM (WARD)

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SUBJECT: WHY TUNISIA NEEDS US FMF

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C/NF) On March 10, al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) announced it had kidnapped two Austrian tourists in Tunisia's southern desert region. While it remains unclear if the tourists were abducted on Tunisian soil, the threat of al-Qaeda to Tunisia is real and growing. It can be measured in many ways, from the increased number of reports of extremist planning attacks to the take down of a large terrorist group a year ago. The Government of Tunisia, specifically the Ministry of Defense, has asked for US assistance to combat this threat by, in part, strengthening control of its borders. Embassy Tunis, proposal for \$34.7 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) in FY-10 would help meet the GOT's need and support the fight against terror in North Africa.

¶2. (C/NF) The GOT was dismayed by the Administration's FY 2008 and FY 2009 budget proposals to slash FMF for Tunisia. The GOT hears our strong rhetorical support for their efforts to combat terrorism, but found our proposals for deep cuts in FMF inconsistent with it. The GOT believes our FMF contribution is essential to their security, and that they would be hard pressed without it. Frankly, at a moment of danger, the GOT now doubts the United States is prepared to help combat the spread of regional terrorism and violent extremism.

¶3. (C/NF) In the past two years, the Ministry of Defense (MOD) has taken on new counterterrorism responsibilities and has deployed troops, equipment and resources to the border regions to prevent terrorists from gaining a foothold in Tunisia. However, the MOD's budget is small, limited by the GOT's own meager resources. Sensibly, the GOT focuses most of its budget on social programs, development and education, all also critical to combating extremism. Today, the Tunisian military relies on decades old US-origin equipment that it lacks the parts to maintain. Our FY-10 FMF request would allow Tunisia to expand flight hours in the border regions, obtain modern border surveillance equipment, and apply the latest CT techniques to its efforts. Without our support, the military's counterterrorism capabilities -- and success -- will be hobbled.

¶4. (C/NF) Last year I made a similar argument for increased FY-09 FMF for Tunisia, but we were unable to respond to Tunisia's needs. Today, the threat continues to grow, and

we must do more to assist Tunisia. The Government of Tunisia shares our views on the importance of combating terrorism. If we want Tunisia's support in addressing the scourge of Muslim extremism, we must provide the foreign assistance that will directly strengthen Tunisia's own efforts.

Please visit Embassy Tunis' Classified Website at:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/tunis/index.cfm>
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